

Examining New Regionalism in Canada

Highlights from a Current Research Initiative

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What is New Regionalism?

How is it reflected in Canadian regional policies?

What difference does it make for local communities?

Introduction

New Regionalism has emerged as a prominent approach for addressing the complexity of territorial development and mitigating the negative impacts associated with both political and industrial restructuring. This research initiative addresses five themes of New Regionalism in the Canadian context: governance, integrated development, place-based development, rural-urban interactions, and knowledge, learning, and innovation. An empirical assessment of Canadian regional development is being employed, using a multi-level network, mixed methods case study approach in four provinces: British Columbia, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Québec.

The three goals of this research are:

- (i) to undertake a critical assessment of the application and relevance of New Regionalism in the Canadian context;
- (ii) to seek Canadian innovations in regional development; and
- (iii) to understand how these innovations are evolving and if and how they are being shared across space in networks of regional development practice.

Framework of New Regionalism

This research contributes to and draw from a growing body of literature in several disciplines that recognizes development as taking place within a complex, changing world where many actors are dynamically interacting at multiple scales. Five core themes of New Regionalism make up our research framework. These five themes are described briefly below. With these interrelated themes the framework is consistent with a systems view that development and the study of development is necessarily interdisciplinary and multifaceted.

Integration - The concept of integrated refers to an approach to development policy and planning that seeks to address the complexity of phenomena, whether the phenomena relate to contextual conditions (e.g. regional economy, local government system), to normative designs (e.g. community recreation outcomes, environmental remediation targets), or to issues of process and practice (e.g. planning procedures, public communications). Integrated perspectives in development policies, programmes and planning incorporate such dimensions of reality as systems and sub-systems, linkages, networks, uncertainty, feedback, interconnected levels, and holism, and are associated with interdisciplinary approaches to analysis and prescription.



Place-Based Development - is a holistic approach to development that seeks to reveal, utilize and enhance the natural, physical, economic, cultural and human capacity assets present within a particular location. New Regionalism incorporates place-based themes in seeking to facilitate territorial forms of planning and development. Place-based development prioritizes the importance of community/regional competitiveness for economic development, the role of quality of life in retaining and attracting both residents and capital, and building relationships of trust for planning and policy purposes.

Rural-Urban Interdependencies - Rural and urban places are interdependent - in spite of occasional claims of the opposite. Our research explores the nature of this interdependency - through exchanges of goods and services, institutional organization, shared environments, and identity. We pay particular attention to the extent that policy undermines or builds upon this interdependency.

Governance- Multi-level governance is a process built on the foundations of collaboration and multiple partnerships among community / region-based organizations, statutory / government agencies, and the private sector, facilitating empowerment within regions through sharing of power and collective decision-making.

Knowledge, Innovation and Learning - New Regionalist research and practice suggests knowledge flows and learning are critical to learning regions. New ideas and adaptations are required for survival and resilience in a changing world, they suggest, and regions are increasingly the level at which innovation is produced.

Upcoming Project Activities

Examining these five themes of New Regionalism, their interconnections and relevance in a national context offers the potential for significant advancement in the theory and practice of regional development in Canada and internationally. The research team has begun a content analysis on the five themes of a large scale field-derived data base (over 200 in-person interviews). The content analysis of the themes focuses on policy, programmes, projects, and practice. Over the course of the next year, conference presentations, papers, website reportings, and an edited volume are planned. Project outputs are available at <http://cdnregdev.wordpress.com>.

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Case Study Regions

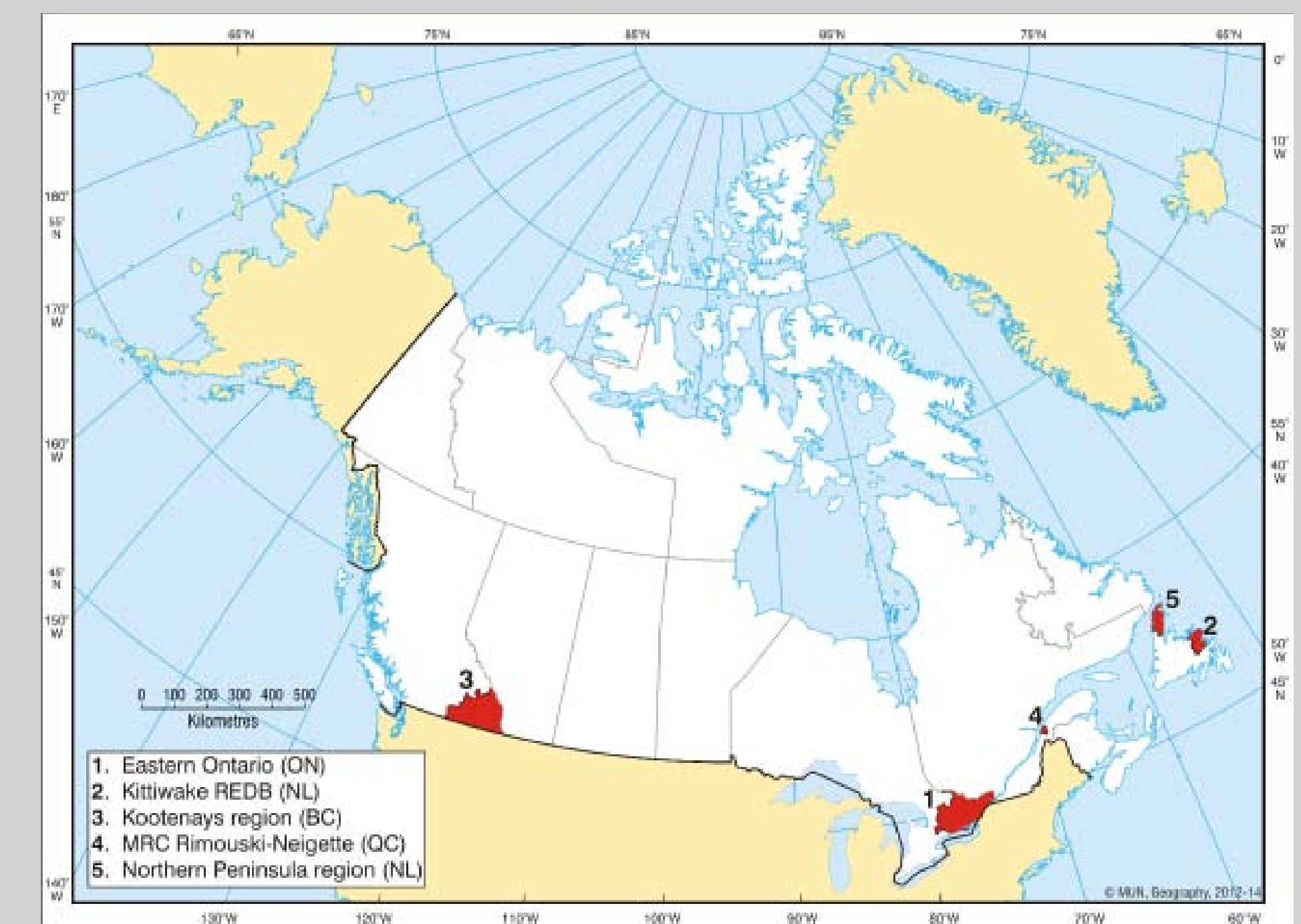
Case studies were selected based on criteria of national scope and regional characteristics, ability to provide insight into the five themes, and feasibility. A range of data sources are being utilized, such as literature reviews, key informant interviews, participant observation at the sub-regional level.

Eastern Ontario

The boundary of Eastern Ontario as designated by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is the region spanning from Durham Region to the Ottawa area. The region is composed of a population of over 1.72 million people, with 14 united counties and 110 townships, municipalities and cities.

Kittiwake/Gander-New-Wes-Valley, Newfoundland

Located in the north eastern coast of insular Newfoundland, this region is delineated by the Regional Economic Development Zone (Kittiwake) and the provincial Rural Secretariat region (Gander – New-Wes -Valley). The region is composed of 119 communities and the total population is 48,850.



Kootenays Region, British Columbia

The region is an aggregation of three of British Columbia's Regional Districts: East Kootenay, Central Kootenay, and Kootenay Boundary. The region consists of 23 Electoral Areas and 25 incorporated municipalities. As a result of physical geography of four mountain ranges the region is isolated, with an area of 57,786.8 km² and a population of 142,110.

MRC Rimouski-Neigette, Québec

The region is located on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River in the heart of the administrative region of Lower St. Lawrence. The regional municipality of Rimouski-Neigette consists of nine municipalities and unorganized territory and represents 54,374 inhabitants.

Northern Peninsula, Newfoundland

The region encompasses approximately 17,483 km², consisting of barren hills, flat marshy plains, rock outcrops, fjords, and mountains. The Northern Peninsula consists of 51 communities with a population was 13,140, a decline of 12.6% from 2001.

** All population figures are based on the 2006 census.*